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Soviet propaganda and U.S. press

Five years ago the best selling novel "The Spike" brought the word "disinformation" to the attention of U.S. news people with a yarn about Soviet use of U.S. journalists to block unfavorable stories about the Soviets (spike them) or finagle publication of stories favorable to them. There were claims that it came close to reality countered by skepticism that it could happen here.

A recent conference at the Hoover Institute, Stanford University, raises the spectre that the co-authors of that book, Robert Moss and Arnaud de Borchgrave, who is now editor of the *Washington Times*, were pretty close to the truth (*E&P*, Oct 26, page 11). Based on interviews with two Soviet defectors, a senior editorial writer for the Voice of America said the Soviet KGB may have hundreds of recruited agents among foreign journalists "ready at any time to place prepared stories in their national media." There was no hard evidence offered that the U.S. is included in this propaganda or disinformation plot, but *E&P* was told both of the defectors "assumed there are people within the media in the U.S. and other countries who can be counted on to place articles in the press."

All of this should be of interest to U.S. editors especially considering a *Wall Street Journal* article Oct. 22 captioned: "Moscow Feeds a Lap-dog Foreign Press."

A former Moscow correspondent for the *Financial Times* from 1976 to 1982, David Satter wrote: "American publications often serve, for many reasons, as transmission belts for Soviet disinformation." His theme was the naivete of U.S. journalists covering the Moscow scene rather than the KGB efforts to subvert U.S. media directly.

"In the first place, faced with a country that requires an exceptional effort of analysis in order to be understood, Western publications traditionally send people who are completely unqualified. There were times during my tenure in Moscow when the percentage of American correspondents who could not speak Russian reached 90%. This meant that Andrei Sakharov, for example, was frequently interviewed for UPI by the agency's Soviet translators who were provided by the KGB. *Time* magazine sent its KGB-provided Soviet translator to interview Soviet citizens as an 'American correspondent.' It was common for non-Russian-speaking correspondents to interview their KGB-provided maids to get the reaction of the Soviet 'man in the street.'"

"As the result of long experience, Soviet officials have been able to turn the manipulation of Western correspondents into something approaching a science," he wrote.

These revelations should raise a red flag before U.S. editors (no pun intended). If U.S. media and their readers are the subjects of propaganda and disinformation by these methods, it is time we went back to attaching labels to stories that might be suspect as to their origins and facts. A few metropolitan newspapers still do this occasionally, but the technique that became popular during the Cold War mostly has been abandoned.

We are in favor of a warning flag on anything questionable to prevent our media from being manipulated.